HOW CAN WE HELP "THE WOMAN WHO TOILS"?

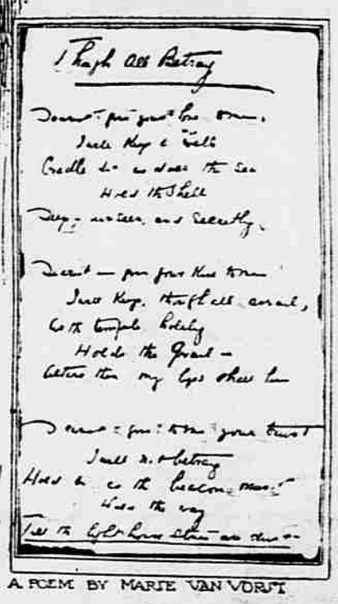
BY MISS MARIE VAN VORST.

MISS MARIE VAN VORST AS BELLE BALLARD IN DRESS OF SOUTHERN MILL HAND

MILL WHERE MISS VAN VORST WORKED

MISS VAN VORST AND TWO LYNN SHOP M--

MISS MARIE VAN VORST



A POEM BY MARIE VAN VORST

ON THE WAY TO THE FACTORY

THE WOMAN WHO TOILS.

The girl who gives fifty-six hours of her week to the task of operating a machine in a shoe factory has no great spirit for history, sewing or art.

When she has finished her "job," if she wants anything but rest, it is to laugh, to utterly change her ideas, rather than to follow studies which she will have no time or occasion to apply.

If you are so fortunate as to direct certain hours of her leisure, fill these with amusement, teach her simple hygiene, the cleanly care of her body.

Deepen her natural affection; her love for her father and mother—awaken and develop her ideals of marriage and motherhood.

These religions—for they are faith and creed—are more salutary for the American working woman as a factor in the economic struggle than a season of art classes.

WRITTEN FOR THE SUNDAY REPUBLIC.

Since the publication of "The Woman Who Toils," I have been constantly presented with statements which benevolence, charity, philanthropy couple with a discouraged gesture as though the benefactors should say:

"I wash my hands of the whole matter, failing to obtain any proper and reasonably expected result.

"Lectures, reading-rooms, clubs, night schools, gymnasiums and amusements are provided for the factory hands, and through disuse the public halls are closed, no one comes to hear the speakers, and the night schools are deserted."

"Will you tell me," no later than last week an earnest young philanthropist asked me: "Will you tell me how to reach the working women?"

"I have given all my time during the last three summers to the factory hands in Vermont. I had quite a following for the first few months at my night classes, where I taught cooking, sewing, history and art. I began with ninety members, and when the class dwindled down to two or three I shut the schools."

Is it not something of the old delusion of Revolutionary times when a Queen naively offered a royal substitution of cake when the people cried for bread?

The woman in a Lynn factory, who at daybreak bends her body over an electric machine for putting ten buttons on a boot at one sole vibration—this woman, who watches the machine with alert senses, lest the dangerous velocity and wonderful skill may treat her as it has treated her friend in the hospital, saw a line of buttons down her own soft hand if she is not on the qui vive—this woman, with strained eyes and tense nerves, narrowing shoulders, who gives fifty-six hours of her week to toil, has no great spirit for art classes!

When she has finished her "job," if she wants anything but rest, it is to laugh, to utterly change her ideas, rather than to follow studies which she will have no time or occasion to apply.

If she can be entertained, she would like to be! Even then—10 to 1—she is too tired. My Lynn shoe-factory friends told me that they were "too tired" to go to the play.

"Why, Sarah Bernhardt, if she came here, like as not, would act to an empty house. We'd just as soon go into a dance hall and take a few good turns, if there's right good music; then you sort of forget when you're dancing; but somehow you don't seem to want to stay still, in one seat, for a couple of hours!"

Therefore, to begin with, even amusement seems at rather a low value.

OF THE COTTON MILL WOMAN SLAVE.

Consider the cotton-mill hand before her carding or spinning frame.

This woman, while you sit before your breakfast table at let us say 9 o'clock on a dark January morning, has been three hours at work in an artificial daylight.

When you have been long at home after the end of your day's occupation, which for the majority of money spenders and money makers ceases in the early hours of the afternoon, she is still spinning or speeding, weaving or carding, well on into the night.

Push the sympathy that many of us must force ourselves to feel for her—who, when we are peacefully sleeping at 2 and 3 and 4 o'clock in the morning, is working on a night shift in a foul-smelling Southern factory in July and August, when all that endurance can bear is one single cotton garment against the heat of the night.

This woman demands, first of all, if she is to have a chance to demand anything—a little less work. She will ask you, if you are going to do anything for her, to make her a little less a slave.

She will call for rest and time. Later she undoubtedly may respond to the requirements of the New World, exacting from its citizens certain enlightenments of intellect, appreciation of the privileges of education.

These things, in our country, the individual is called upon to possess if he or she intends competing in the general struggle for pre-eminence, or if he hopes to enter the race for survival.

These contditions instantly suggest their own remedies, and not remedies which individuals can apply or charitable institutions impose, but which must come from the undoubted intentions of the men who own the Southern cotton mills and the stockholders. Only through the efforts and action of capitalists who control these industries can an immediate and valuable result be reached.

Moreover, reforms and improvements flowing directly from the sources where those reforms and improvements should arise are the most important, the most reasonable and the most desirable.

These do not savor of exaggeration; these arise neither from religious, fanaticism nor from ideals and ephemeral theories, which can only, if ever, do good for a period.

In order to really improve a state, its condition must be understood from the inside as well as from the outside.

No one is in so enviable a position to help the laboring classes as the men who control their toil.

FORCE OF A TRUTHFUL STATEMENT.

I cannot see why a plain and truthful statement of conditions and of facts, and pictures drawn from the life, should not inspire the manufacturer and whomsoever may be interested with means and methods for amelioration.

No utterly unreal phase of life has the elements of permanence; abnormalities and exaggerations pass and are sure to be effaced in the fine and reasonable march that the world keeps toward what is durable and good.

The manufacturer himself knows that the conditions in the cotton mills—I speak chiefly of South Carolina—cannot remain as they are.

A spirit which, a certain number of years ago, struck off the shackles from a darker race—a spirit, whether alive to-day in the indigenous people whom we call "white trash," or whether to be declared in the onlooker, will surely stimulate revolt against inhuman cupidity, against the keeping under of thousands of people who by birth, color and by natural rights are thoroughly able to compete with other citizens.

Soon not to be denied, demands through organized bodies representing the laborer in this country will force readjustment upon the commercial and manufacturing world.

We perfectly understand that when the Southern cotton mills were first constructed in a barren, almost savage, country, modern improvements, such as to-day delight us when we consider model mills in Dayton, O., could not even have a likeness in the South.

But after years of commercial success, when these ventures in the wilderness of South Carolina and Alabama and Georgia have crowned the stockholder and capitalist with so many golden rewards; when dividends pay so fatly; when it is a temptation to invest in cotton-mill stock—the time is ripe for the introduction of new methods, not alone for the better weaving of the cloth, not even for labor-saving machines alone, but for certain humanitarian ideas.

The time indeed is so ripe that the mill hands will wrest it from the tree of opportunity unless the manufacturers themselves are on their guard.

These people are prepared to do honor to the name of citizens, and it seems a pity that they should be destroyed in their childhood and broken in their manhood and youth under a system of eleven, twelve, thirteen hours a day labor.

We must remember that there is nothing unnatural in the condition of the Southern manufactory.

It is in its brilliant success a most flattering tribute to the energy of the Northern capitalist and to the ready response of the South, and we look with confidence to the change in conditions with the next few years, when these willing and humble aids to the commercial wealth of the southern part of our country are considered as intelligent factors and are treated accordingly.

Up to the present moment they have been forgotten as human beins in the mad rush for wealth.

Concessions lately obtained all over our country by the laborers, concessions which, although not absolute, are interestingly indicative, will intoxicate, North and South, the heads of labor and their colleagues.

Last of all, perhaps, will those forgotten and waste tracts of sandy country, where the "poor white trash" work day and night, be reached; but it will not be very long when these remote districts are thoroughly represented.

PRACTICAL EFFORT OF THE PHILANTHROPIST.

There would be less discouragement and skepticism regarding practical effort if the philanthropist, instead of rushing in with a handful of unproved theories, would study the people from their own standpoints, and divest himself of parti pris—a difficult thing to do in the eminently original present age.

The cotton spinner is in no condition to brook experiments; and it will be found that the class is slow to respond to theoretical philanthropy.

Indeed, the mill hand is likely to tell you, if she supposes you have any innovation to suggest in her manners, customs, that she is "all right and does not need you."

The value of the work in "The Woman Who Toils" lies very much in the closeness of standpoint it has been able to establish between the writers and the daughters of labor.

The philanthropist who would go and for a year weave cotton cloth and spin; who would herd with the toilers and share their bed and board, other things being equal, would be likely to evolve ideas and reach conclusions of value and vital interest to the economist, to the manufacturer and to the laborer.

The best of all is to let the people speak to us. If once given a chance, they will not be slow to reveal the truth of the whole situation, and to ask, not so much for what they want, but for what they need.

It is a privilege reserved for the rich to have what they want.

We begin, when we have nothing at all, to demand what we need, and are thankful if we get it. In a certain State of this Union a little while ago a vote was taken among the factory women employed in a model factory town. The factories had supplied numerous and kindly reforms.

There were lectures, baths, reading-rooms, amusements, gymnasiums, Bible classes, footstools, trained nurses, elevators, short hours, recess, hot food at noon, ventilation and clean floors.

Now, propagators of educational ideas—now, subtle readers of the needs of working women—will you be so kind as to note what these human machines honored with their preference? It seems to me that in the above list are pretty well represented the ultra-age advantages which America offers to its extremely progressive women.

Even a spinster of the leisure class, with nothing but her own improvement at heart and the development of her own selfish individualism before her eyes, could in this list find sufficient material to transform herself into the ambiguous type of modern woman, the suffragist, short-skirted, athletic and "progressive."

These factory girls, who had before them the prospect and back of them the memory of years of toil and of needs—let us say "wants"—voted in the majority—in the large majority—voted for hot food, first of all; second, for ventilation and clean floors; third, for short hours.

After this the figures are so divided that they yield no great point of interest. It may be noted that calisthenics go 'way down in the list, which proves that the athletic woman, the sport, is not at a high premium in the laboring class, or, possibly, it reveals that the working woman is too tired to develop herself physically.

But it shows us surely, in my humble opinion, not that gymnastics and Bible classes and amusements and education are undesirable things, but that for a woman who works from fifty-four to sixty-six hours a week they are only "wants," scarcely needs.

AMERICAN WORKMAN ASKS TO BE PROPERLY ENVIRONED.

The want deals primarily with the body which must win its daily bread and claim a right to existence, and as it works must be fed and nourished.

What could be more human and more simple and less ultra than what I quote to you—that the surroundings in which she must pass most of her life shall be reasonably clean and reasonably healthful?

Is it not also a little pathetic, even while reasonable and devoid of sentimental plea for sympathy?

The courageous, splendid creature, the American working woman, asks, first of all, to be properly fed and properly environed as she toils.

I think it is a surprise to us all that short hours should come even third in the list.

Thirdly, then, the woman asks for time.

Let me show the charitable man and woman and the benefactor and philanthropist that for a moment we must all stand aside.

The question is lifted by the great law of harmony out of our hands. It remains in the hands of the ones who should reasonably answer it—the manufacturer can give to his employes the things which they in mass demand.

Please do not think for a moment that I undervalue the beauty of effort made by every man and woman who seeks to help or to better the working people, nor is there any reason why honest effort should cease.

Be assured that when decent conditions exist in the lives of the factory girls, when their hours are shorter, when their pay is better, they will eagerly extend their hands and open their minds to the advantages that their more leisure brothers and sisters pine to give them.

There is another thing which seems very much to discourage the worker among the factory girls.

Over and over these people have complained to me that the only way the factory girl seems to care to spend her evenings is with her "young man."

And why not?

May I ask simply here, Is it an unnatural thing that, after her day of toil, the factory girl, once free, should seek what seems to her the most agreeable and restful thing that a woman's mind and nature can know—the companionship of the opposite sex?

That this companionship is always for the bad is very far from the case.

The amusements, when they have them, of these people, certainly in the North, are, for the most part, decent and innocent; and those helpers who really seek to make the evenings of the factory girls enjoyable and a success will not act amiss if they combine clubs which include both sexes, and entertainments where the young men and the young women are both invited.

Every situation in the world can be improved when its natural conditions are thoroughly understood and when its sequence is logically carried out.

I want to speak here a little further of the factory girl's food. At noon the fagged body and the exhausted nervous system demand, unfortunately, something that will stimulate more than something that will nourish.

Of course, in our country the luncheon of a French working woman would not only be misunderstood, but would not be tolerated.

The French girl takes at noon a piece of wholesome and coarse bread, a glass of red wine, possibly a bowl of vegetable soup.

Some of them eat a stew. This food costs in France only a few sous.

In our country the girl takes a piece of pie well powdered with cinnamon, a pickle, some candy possibly, and I knew one working girl whose lunch consisted of a glass of ice cream soda. Scarcely necessary to say that she was an unhealthy specimen; she said she was "too tired to eat."

I also know a young woman who, day in and day out, makes her midday meal from lettuce salad and a piece of pie.

All this is in the North, and I am now speaking of those girls who go out at noon to get their repast.

The "hand" who, at her machine, eats her lunch, takes often a sandwich and an apple. Horrible as is the Southern mill hand's food, it is more substantial—pork, corn bread, molasses and hominy.

This at least makes fiber. There is no more absurd sophistry, to my thinking, than the plea that these people are used to what they have.

What, in the struggle for existence, do they represent to us as individuals? They are easily the victims of indigestion, dyspepsia, martyrs to backache, nearsighted and nervously tired.

The Southern mill hands are consumptive, wan and colorless—women old and gray before their time.

This complexion of the subject in nowise prevents the existence of the gay and debonair young ladies of Perry and of other manufacturing towns.

I have already said that there are "swells" in labor.

The cheapness with which one can buy poor qualities of goods in America places in the possibility of possession of these young women who choose to spend all their surplus on their clothes goods which imitate the extravagant dresses of the rich—certainly within the possibility of those who make $14, $18 and even $20 a week.

Statistics will show how small is the percentage of these high-waged earners.

Is there any reason why because a certain number of factory girls can wear ostrich plumes in their hats the thousands who gain from $2 to $8 a week should be ignored in their struggle?

Of enormous importance is the influence upon the workroom of the forewoman.

This woman perhaps has never realized how far-reaching her power may be.

It is important and delightful if the woman of the people can have her ideas elevated by lectures, by reading and whatever general education introduces to her thoughts.

It is also important that the man who owns the mills in which she works should inspire her with respect for his principles, with appreciation for his methods; that he should become a figurehead to her of generosity and broad thought, and that the woman in charge over her should be superior in other ways than in authority alone.

When I am asked questions regarding the morality of the people with whom I have been associated in their labor, I am inclined to say that they are no different from the class called better.

Indeed, for sound principle, the mill girl compares very favorably with her sister of the smart set.

The question is so relative—indeed, so delicate, that one is forced to put it rather in this form: Is the mill hand, compared to her sister on Fifth avenue and thereabouts, immoral?

There are celebrated scandals, whose settings have back of them Newport and Tuxedo and our own city, whose details would cause the Southern cotton spinner to exclaim with surprise were they recounted to her as she bends her tired and untidy figure over the pork and suet on the bare pine board which forms her dining table.

She would lift her naive eyes, whose surfaces have never reflected other things than whirring spindles and the scenes of her primitive existence; she might even blush; at all events, she would say:

"Ef my 'sport' would marry me, he suttinly would never be sorry for it, and I guess I'd be pretty sure to stick by him if he'd give me a weddin' ring."

Let me say in closing, to those who ask me, "What can we take to the factory girl?"

If you are so fortunate as to direct certain hours of her leisure, fill these with amusement, teach her simple hygiene, the cleanly care of her body.

Do not, moreover, absorb all her evenings with interests outside her home. Teach her to find interest there, to take pleasure to her own hearth.

Deepen her natural affection; her love for her father and mother—awaken and develop her ideals of marriage and motherhood.

These religions—for they are faith and creed—are more salutary for the American working woman as a factor in the economic struggle than a season of art classes.

So long as the extravagances of the millionaire are aped by the girl who gives her very body's life to purchase her fineries; so long as independence, woman's rights, selfculture at the expense of femininity are preached, and the woman who bears nine children is described by her friends as "an animal," and the bachelor maid is envied—just so long will right conceptions of life be clouded alike to factory girl, mill hand and leisure class.

Welcome, rather, the high ideal of the unselfish character, the gentle, loving woman whom men seek with all their hearts and whom children bless!

MARIE VAN VORST.

MISS MARIE VAN VORST AND HER WORK.

What manner of women? Such is the question one is sure to ask regarding Bessie and Marie Van Vorst after reading their joint book, "The Woman Who Toils." Those who have read the book followed with pleasure and rare interest the adventures of the two American girls who went to work in factories. These adventures are recounted with such vividness, with so much literary skill and insight into human motives, that the reader finds himself speculating as to the personalities of the authors. These original and energetic young women are sisters-in-law. Miss Marie Van Vorst is the daughter of the late Judge Van Vorst of the Supreme Court and Chancellor of the State of New York. She is a New Yorker born and bred, although a resident of Paris for the last eight years. Mrs. Bessie Van Vorst, nee McInnis, likewise a New Yorker, is the widow of John Van Vorst, and she is also a Parisienne by adoption.

"The Woman Who Toils" is not their first book. A novel entitled "Bagsby's Daughter" and numerous short stories stand to the credit of their joint production, and Miss Marie Van Vorst is the author of that successful industrial novel entitled "Philip Longstreth," as well as two volumes of verses.

Miss Van Vorst has written of herself:

"Luxuries are to me what necessities are to another. A boot too heavy, a dress ill hung, a stocking too thick are annoyances which to the self-indulgent woman of the world are absolute discomforts. To omit the daily bath is little less than a crime in the calendar; an odor bordering on the foul creates nausea to nostrils ultra-refined; undue noises are nerve exhausting. If any three things are more unendurable to me than others, they are noises, bad smells and close air."

MISS VAN VORST'S MOST ENGAGING PERSONALITY.

With recollections of these passages, quoted at random from Miss Van Vorst's portion of the book, a meeting with the real Miss Van Vorst was full of gratifying surprises, and it was a pleasant relief to discover in the course of the interview which followed that she is exceedingly democratic, is not unduly fond of fine clothes and would rather write verses than eat her dinner.

It was just the day before she sailed for Europe and was busily engaged in packing trunks. Tall and reedlike in form, with a delicately chiseled face, shadowed by masses of dark hair, this twin author of one of the most remarkable books of the year, would not suggest, by appearance, any acquaintance with anything so concrete as industrial economics.

"My interest in labor problems and in economic subjects generally is a development of years and years of almost continuous observation of conditions among working people here and abroad, where I have lived for many years," she said, folding up a faded brown calico dress, which she explained was a relic of her mill apprenticeship in the South.

"Yes, we did have a pretty hard time, both my sister-in-law and myself. How hard nobody can realize who has not tried working in a factory and living as the factory girl does. Look at that!"

Miss Van Vorst held up a long, slender right hand, the index finger of which was calloused and crooked and slightly discolored.

"My trophy from the shoe factory at Lynn, Mass.," she said. "They say it is doubtful whether it will ever be white and straight again. But I am fortunate. I am told that the girls who work at 'cleaning' year after year lose the nail of that finger entirely. It is eaten off by the poison in the dye.

MORAL PLOBLEMS OF MILL LIFE.

"No, I did not find the moral problems of mill-girl life, as regards her employer, a serious one, at least in the North. The average boss, foreman or employer is generally chivalrous and respectful toward the working woman. There are exceptions, of course, but those exceptions are usually the result of conditions which can be and are governed by the girl herself. I should say that the American working girl is entire mistress of her delicate situation. She almost invariably demands and receives the respect of the men by whom and with whom she is employed.

"I was a factory girl, doomed not to days and weeks of this awful toil, of this cheerless existence, but for years, for life. My former personality had slipped from me as completely as the Parisian garments I had laid aside to assume the working woman's garb. I was no longer Marie Van Vorst. I was Belle Ballard.

"That they have been profitable literary experiences I must admit. They have given me an insight into economic conditions which would have been unobtainable in any other way."

TOLD IN FIGURES.

Ninety per cent of the wealth of the United States is held by 10 per cent of the people.

The weight of the average baby's brain at birth is a little more than three-fourths of a pound.

Seventy-nine per cent of the population of the United States were born within the State or Territory of their present residence.

The cattle king of the Western plains is passing away forever. A few years ago there were nearly 100 millionaire exclusive cattlemen in the Southwest. Now there are but thirty.

An official estimate made of the forest area of the United States puts it at 700,000,000 acres.

Had the forests been intelligently managed the amount of merchantable timber in them would be ten times as great.

The science of forestry is now taught in more than forty schools.

Yale and Cornell universities and the special college at Biltmore, N. C., have advanced classes and give degrees in forestry.

First Photograph of "Tony" Faust Since His Recovery From an Accident at Wiesbaden Last December.

This postal card photograph was received by his son, Mr. A. R. Faust, a few days ago. It was made at Nice, March 27. It shows Mr. Faust much reduced in weight, an achievement for which he strove by faithful athletic training, when he was interrupted by his accident. He is now entirely recovered, and as a by-script to his picture adds the lines by Ravelais: "When the devil was sick, the devil a monk would be; when the devil was well, the devil of a monk was he."